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CONTENTS

Page

1. Christian Encounter with Men of Other Religions . . 3

2. The Present Situation of Racial and Ethnic Tensions and the Nature of their Challenge to the Churches by DAISUKE KITAGAWA 11

3. The Quest for Unity in Evangelism by Dr. PAUL D. DEVANANDAN 16

Christian Encounter with Men of Other Religions

A Contribution from the Study of
"The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men"

During recent months small regional consultations on "The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men" have been held in Jerusalem, India, Hong Kong and Burma, the latter three in co-operation with the East Asia Christian Conference. Each of the consultations brought together Christians possessing considerable knowledge of the dominant religion and the dynamics of social change within the region. Serious efforts were made to understand the nature of the "living faiths", the relation between the Gospel and these faiths, and the problems involved in the communication of the Gospel to those who live by these faiths. The reports and statements of the consultations (available from the World Council of Churches, 17 route de Malagnou, Geneva) contain much information and some insights into basic issues. Nevertheless, the issues are of such difficulty that the discussions in the consultations could only be, as indicated in the reports, a beginning.

Following the four consultations it was decided to convene a small group which would receive the reports, reflect upon them, and attempt to draw up a statement of its own. Plans had been made earlier by the Department of Missionary Studies for a meeting of directors of various "Centres for the Study

of the Non-Christian Religions" in Asia. Accordingly, arrangements were made for these directors and a few theologians to undertake the task.

The meeting was held at the headquarters of the National Christian Council of India in Nagpur, March 11-15, with the following participants:

Dr. David G. Moses (Chairman), Principal, Hislop College, Nagpur, India.
Dr. Paul D. Devanandan, Director, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Bangalore, India.
Shri M. M. Thomas, Associate Director, Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, Panavila, Thycaud, Trivandrum, India.
Dr. W. L. Jeyasingham, Director, Institute for Christian Study, Jaffna, Ceylon.
Dr. Robert P. Kramers, Secretary, Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion, Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong.
Dr. Richard Bush, Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion, Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong.
Rev. Sakae Kobayashi, Christian Centre for the Study of Japanese Religions, Kyoto, Japan.
Dr. P. David, Principal, Gurukul Lutheran Theological College and Research Institute, Madras, India.
Dr. Jan Hermelink, Executive Secretary, German Missionary Council, Hamburg, Germany.
Rev. V. E. W. Hayward, Secretary, Department of Missionary Studies, International Missionary Council, London.
Rev. Harry B. Partin, Secretary for the Study of "The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men", World Council of Churches, Geneva.

The temptation was very great for the group to limit itself to a summary of the various discussions together with some indications of the different approaches and the unresolved issues. Instead, it attempted the more difficult task of trying to discern the direction in which these and other discussions seem to be moving and to make a positive but tentative statement on the basis of these indications. The statement says: "The new meeting with men of other faiths forces us to recognize the necessity for theological restatement. It is too early to anticipate what form such a restatement may take, but it may be possible to indicate some directions in which the process of rethinking should move." Negatively, the trend of much of the discussion is to avoid the theoretical alternatives between "continuity" and "discontinuity" (the Tambaram debate) or "general revelation" and "special revelation" in stating the relation between the Gospel and the "living faiths of men". Positively, the statement describes the approach which seems to be emerging in the discussions as one which centers on the relation between the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as "the Way and the Truth and the Life" (John 14 : 6) and the Christian's solidarity with other men as creatures of God and objects of His love and care whether they so understand themselves or not. The document tries to draw some conclusions from this approach for the relation of the Gospel and human religions and for the encounter of Christians with men of these religions. In its brevity and incompleteness it only begins to work out the relation between the Christian's convictions regarding the uniqueness of Christ and his human solidarity with other men. A main value of the following statement is that it indicates where further study and discussion should now begin.

INTRODUCTION

Since 1955 the World Council of Churches and the International Missionary Council have been engaged in a study of "The Word of God and the Living Faiths of Men" in an effort to take up in a fresh and relevant way the question of the relationship of Christian faith to the other living faiths and the encounter of Christians with men of these faiths. At Kuala Lumpur in 1959 the East Asia Christian Conference proposed that the study should give particular attention to the interaction of religion and society and that the study programme should consist of a series of regional consultations with reference to the major religions of Asia. Accordingly, regional consultations have been held in Jerusalem, India, Hong Kong, and Burma. This report is an attempt to sum up the findings of the study to date.

We feel that we are able, at the present juncture, to say something about the following matters:

1. The realization that these faiths are indeed living faiths.
2. The new awareness of our human solidarity, consequent kinship with other men as men, and the common involvements in challenges and opportunities which we face together with non-Christians in our national and international life in Asia.
3. The need for a re-assessment of our theological understanding of the relationship of the Gospel to the religions.
4. A fresh understanding of the consequent implications of these new emphases for the communication of the Gospel, on the one hand, and for the self-understanding of the Church, on the other.

I. *THE RENAISSANCE OF RELIGIONS*

The religions of Asia are living realities. This was one of the facts strongly emphasized in each of the consultations. The resources of religious faiths are being directed toward the efforts for national reconstruction in the context of the total cultural transformation of Asian peoples. The striving for human values such as social justice, human rights, and a better life for the individual gives rise to and is strongly supported by the rediscovery of these values in the religious traditions. This has in turn led to a restatement of the fundamentals of the historic faiths to meet the demands of the new age.

The forces of the new age have been very real factors in awakening these ancient faiths to new life. Some of these forces are the impact of modern science and technology, Western liberalism, the spread of Communist ideology, and, not least, the work of Christian missions and churches. The combination of these forces has created a revolutionary situation in which the traditional faiths face new demands which call in question their continued hold. As a result, the historic faiths of Asia have assimilated values and emphases from each other

as well as from Christianity. They are now seeking to establish their claim to provide adequate dynamic of faith for modern Asian man. The study of classical scriptures such as the Confucian Four Books, the *Bhagavada Gita*, the *Lotus Sutra*, and the *Qur'an* is being revived, and there is a trend to commend them as universal scriptures, adequate for the present time and for all time. Today other faiths claim to be universal and missionary in a new sense. Indeed, some of these religions, for example, Buddhism and Hinduism, claim to have a more adequate basis for universality than does Christianity.

The fact of the multi-religious character of the population in many Asian countries has provided an urge to dissociate the cultural element from the religious in order to create a sense of national solidarity and a basis for common action. Furthermore, there is a quest for a common culture. A certain measure of secularization of culture is inherent in this process. This has been welcomed by some religious groups as making possible the recovery of the true meaning of religion and its relation to secular life; such groups are making attempts to evolve a new secularism with a religious motivation. This new secularism stands alongside the secularism which protests against all religions. The tendency towards secularization, however, is challenged by certain orthodox groups in some countries which try to reassert the old religio-cultural unity as the only basis for national wholeness. In order to safeguard national unity, leaders in some other countries in Asia have thought it necessary to assert the religion and culture of the majority by proclaiming a state religion.

The general loosening of the bond between culture and religion has had its effect on the Christian minorities in these Asian lands who have been enabled to begin to dissociate the Christian faith from Western culture and to identify themselves increasingly with the culture of their own countries. They are making serious efforts to re-establish their kinship with the people of whom they are part. One consequence of this is a more sympathetic and understanding attitude towards other faiths as part of their common heritage.

All this is a part of the process of gaining self-understanding and self-esteem of Asian peoples which lies at the heart of all contemporary Asian expressions of national self-hood.

The renaissance is not confined to the intellectual and literate of the population, but is also expressed in the revival of devotional and cultic practices as, for example, renewed stress on meditation in Buddhism and temple worship in Hinduism. The trends are so pervasive and widespread that we may well say that we are seeing the signs of a general transformation. Undoubtedly, there are pockets of undeveloped areas into which the new ideas and forces have not yet penetrated. Also, we must admit that we do not have sufficient knowledge of all Asian countries. In particular, the churches in China have not been able to participate in this study and to share information.

In this description of the Asian scene we must remember that various revolutions which successively covered several centuries in the West are taking place simultaneously and within a short period of time in Asia. This in part explains the prevailing climate of contrary and alternating moods which characterizes this generation. Confidence seems to shade off into despair, receptivity to suggestion alternates with sensitiveness to criticism, and the eager anxiety to keep pace with modern progress is in strange contrast to nostalgia for the once glorious past.

II. *AWARENESS OF COMMON HUMANITY*

One significant discovery in the course of the study has been the new emphasis laid in all religions today on the fact of our common humanity. Of recent times mankind has been thrown together to confront problems that challenge the very existence of man, and men of all faiths have been called on to work together for the common good, the peace of the world, and even for the preservation of life on the earth. In all religions there is a new recognition of the worth and dignity of the human person in relation to other persons constituting what we call society. There is also evidence in contemporary religious renaissance of a recognition of responsible human decisions in the making of history. It would no longer be true to say that Asian religions encourage an attitude of passive resignation and inactivity in the here and now. On the contrary, there is a new activism which draws on religious sources and finds expression in collective endeavour to realize new social goals.

Undoubtedly, this truth of our common humanity has always been a part of Biblical teaching that God has created of one blood all nations, but in the history of the Christian Church this truth has not been given full expression. Therefore, in this process the Christian has also gained a new understanding of what God has done for men in Christ as having been done for all men.

This re-discovery of our common humanity has made possible a common action and a better understanding of the basis of such action in each other's faith. But, at the same time, it has resulted in a more conscious endeavour to emphasize the fundamental differences in the core of beliefs and practices in the different religions ; in some instances, the core seems to be growing harder and more distinctive. Nevertheless, as never before in human history men of all religions and adherents of secular faiths seem prepared to join forces not only to fight against common evils but also to work for positive ends. Participation in common enterprises for the reorganization of family, society, and state has become meaningful both to Christians and to men of other faiths.

Not all Christians, however, are adequately equipped to exercise this ministry of participation to which this generation has been called. One of the questions with which the consultations wrestled was that of how this participation can be truly Christian. It was repeatedly pointed out that such participation provides a unique opportunity for a new kind of dialogue between Christians and others on the nature and destiny of man which has social and evangelistic dimensions. Thus it is an occasion for Christian witness.

III. *THEOLOGICAL RESTATEMENT*

The new meeting with men of other faiths forces us to recognize the necessity for theological restatement. It is too early to anticipate what form such a restatement may take, but it may be possible to indicate some directions in which the process of rethinking should move.

It has become evident that a fresh attempt at a theological statement of the relation of the Gospel to the living faiths of men should not remain entangled in theoretical alternatives such as continuity and discontinuity or general and

special revelation. It should rather start from the Biblical message that as God is the creator of all men, so is His salvation in Jesus Christ offered to all men, and that in Him there is a New Creation. He is the Way and the Truth and the Life (John 14 : 6). In Him God's covenant with His people was consummated and through His cross and His glorious resurrection, He has given to all men of all nations "access in one Spirit to the Father". (Eph. 2 : 18.) It is by "the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead" (Rom. 8 : 11) that we have hope. That Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, grants us sonship and calls us out of fear together with the whole creation which "itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God". (Rom. 8 : 21.)

God has called His Church to be among men the community of witness to His salvation and His kingdom. In various ways through the religious and secular movements of our time He is preparing the people to discern the true meaning of this offer of salvation in Christ and to face the decision for or against Him. The Church must not only discern the work of the Spirit in the world but be present in the world, responding to Him and making His presence and lordship known. We cannot explain why God has in his wisdom chosen for Himself the Church to be His witness. In the new encounter with men of other faiths it has become clear to us that we have as Christians nothing in our hands which might from a religious point of view be called superior. Neither in the strength of religious consciousness nor in the depth of metaphysical thinking, neither in the awareness of harmony with the universe nor in the effort for spiritual self-liberation can we claim as Christians to excel those who are not Christians. But we are called to be obedient. We cannot be obedient to our calling as Christians except in the forms of religious expression, which at its deepest level is an expression of our common humanity.

It is therefore necessary to get to that point theologically where our being called out of the world into the glorious liberty of the children of God immediately places us in solidarity with all men. Perhaps the most profound solidarity with men of other faiths lies in the fact that man is always tempted to use his religiousness in order to assert himself in the face of God. Religious man, even Christian religious man, remains a rebel against God.[1] But it is at this point where we

[1] *Editorial Note :* This and some other statements in the section are based on a distinction between "Gospel" and "religion" which found expression in some of the consultations (most clearly in Dr. Paul Clasper's paper for the consultation in Burma, "Buddhism and Christianity in the Light of God's Revelation in Christ"). This distinction, which appeared nearly thirty years ago in H. Frick's small book, *Das Evangelium und die Religionen* (1933), emphasizes the ambiguity of religion as both a human response and a human resistance to the self-revealing activity of God. In other terms, man's religions reveal both a groping for God and a fleeing from Him. The Gospel exposes the character of the religions and brings them under its judgment. Insofar as it is a "religion", empirical Christianity is under the same judgment as the other religions. The expression of the Christian faith in time and space inevitably takes religious forms and in that respect it is alongside other religions in many respects. The main problem in this distinction is the *relation* between the Gospel and Christianity. It is maintained that the relation differs from the relation between the Gospel and other religions. While various views of the relation have been put forward, e.g., the view that Christianity is a "justified" religion, a great deal more thinking needs to be done if the radical distinction between "Gospel" and "religion" is to be maintained and to contribute to the encounter of Christians with men of other religions.

are put into solidarity with other men that our religiousness as Christians which excludes all claims of superiority over others can provide the basis and the climate for genuine communication. Real obedience does not bind us to the set patterns of any one traditional or modern style of Christian living and witness, nor does it prevent us from using any pattern of religion or religionless secularism. It rather frees us to make full use of the language, the thought forms, the customs and the ethos we find in the religious heritage of our country without anxiety about distinguishing between "kernel" and "husk". Obedience, freely rendered, will include our readiness to accept within the one Church a variety of forms of Christian living, because obedience is not timeless and static. One can be obedient only concretely. This means that the same obedience to God of necessity takes on different forms in different situations. This fact calls for a new appraisal of syncretism. Through concrete obedience in the encounter and solidarity with various cultures and even segments of cultures, the Church of necessity becomes syncretistic from a cultural point of view that it may render obedient witness to all men. We want especially to draw attention to the fact that contemporary secularist movements in their variety are part of the common humanity. Therefore, they are to be studied and taken seriously as an important element in the religious situation of our time.

We have become aware, however, that even the new solidarity which is found in our common humanity poses afresh and perhaps more pointedly than ever before the question of the exclusiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ. In the contemporary religious situation we find men of other faiths as well as secularists of many persuasions earnestly seeking for a new personal understanding of the meaning of life amidst the revolutionary scientific and technological transformations of life in Asia. We are forbidden to minimize the human values which are emerging through the renaissance of religions. At the same time, we are called to proclaim in all humility the uniqueness of God's revelation in our Lord Jesus Christ, "for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God". (I Cor. 1 : 18.)

We believe that God, as He has been active in all history since creation, is active in the religious changes of our time. In the light of these changes the theological significance of the religions should be defined in a new way. In the consultations some spoke of the redemptive activity of God even within other faiths, while others preferred to speak of God's forbearance with mankind because of His plan of salvation that the Gospel of His kingdom should be proclaimed to all men. But we were all agreed that such new theological interpretation must be based on a proper understanding of other faiths in their living forms as experienced in actual encounter with their adherents. We are convinced that this will enrich our understanding of our own calling as Christians.

IV. *IMPLICATIONS*

What has been said above indicates the necessity for a fresh understanding of the whole task of Christian witness. This means that we must review the methods and means so far employed in the communication of the Gospel, and,

at the same time, we must seek a new understanding of the structure and function of the Church as the bearer of the Gospel. In all the consultations we were constantly reminded of these needs.

From the standpoint of communication we are faced with the difficulty created by the use of traditional Christian vocabulary which is often unintelligible to men of other faiths. An effort should therefore be made to use the religious categories of thought with which others are familiar in order to convey the Christian message. Such usage calls for careful study of meanings and contexts and constant awareness of the possible dangers of defeating the very purpose of our good intention. This must not, however, deter us from courageously endeavouring to utilize these terms in the service of the Gospel, for they can be filled with Christian content. We should note the freedom with which New Testament writers employed terms and concepts drawn from contemporary religious movements (for example, *archai*, *exousiai*, *thronoi*, *stoicheia tou kosmou*, etc.).

The Christian evangelist should study sympathetically similarities in the expression of theological ideas and religious experience in other faiths and use them as points of departure for the communication of Christian truth.

There is further need for seriously experimenting with various methods of dramatic presentation of the Gospel. For example, by using liturgical forms the intellectualism and emotionalism in which the Gospel is often preached can be avoided.

Truth in Christ as the ultimate meaning of the totality of things is relevant to the quest for truth at all levels. In Asian religions the quest for philosophical truth is closely bound up with all religious endeavours. Therefore, in the presentation of the Gospel the relevance of Christian truth to philosophical truth should be recognized. This calls for Christian participation in the contemporary striving of Eastern thought to grapple with the meaning of existence in terms of personality and history. This is a necessary implication of the proclamation of the Gospel of the Person and Work of Christ as the revelation of God in history. Christian institutions of higher learning, including those for the training of the ministry, should take heed of this fundamental task.

Similarly, through participation in the struggle for justice and for an adequate social and political philosophy for our times, Christians should witness to the relevance of the Gospel for the renewal of society and state.

Effective communication of the Gospel is integrally related to a proper self-understanding of the Church, not as an organization setting forth a Christian "system" of doctrine and a Christian "pattern" of society, but as a sign of God's reconciliation with man in Christ. The cultural pattern and the organization of church life in Asian lands has yet to be emancipated from its historical identification with Western culture. If the Church is to become indigenous, it is not by cutting itself adrift from Western culture nor by reshaping itself in terms of traditional cultures but by courageously relating itself to the patterns of an emerging culture. This cannot be an artificial process. It will happen only if Christians, in obedience to the Gospel, involve themselves in the dynamic cultural movements of our time. A world renewed in Christ, the New Creation, is the sum and substance of the message of the Church. It is the high calling of the Church to be the earnest of this New Creation.

Nagpur, India

March 15, 1961

The Present Situation

of Racial and Ethnic Tensions and the Nature of their Challenge to the Churches

by Daisuke Kitagawa
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Racism is afoot with a new vigour, seriously challenging the Christian Church the world over.

1) Racial and ethnic tensions constitute a social *context* in which modern man lives and in which the Christian, too, has to live and witness to the Gospel.
2) Racial and ethnic tensions are a social *issue* which the Christian qua Christian has to speak to and do something about.
3) The nature of the problem is such as to challenge the integrity of the Church.

I.

Modern man, regardless of his race, colour, ethnic origin or religion, and irrespective of where he lives, lives within racial and ethnic tensions. His conception of the virtues taught in Christian social ethics or moral theology are apt to be conditioned, if not distorted, by the existing racial and ethnic tensions. Many a good Christian is finding it exceedingly difficult simply to love, or be loved by, another person as his friend, neighbour or even as a brother in Christ when racial and ethnic tension is acute in his society. What does the Church have to say to such a person or how can it help him ? To condemn him outright

for his manifestation of racial prejudice does not seem right. Neither is it enough merely to exhort him to be "colour-blind". To stop at this may even be morally irresponsible on the part of the Church, for racial and ethnic tensions today constitute too strong a social force to be dismissed just by forgetting them. Both the hopes and the fears of modern man are shaped by his position in reference to the racial and ethnic situation. His status in society is determined to a large extent by the racial-ethnic group to which he belongs, and his understanding of tension will also be conditioned by the same factor.

Racial and ethnic tensions thus compel modern man to re-examine the meaning of his being and existence as a man. At the same time, they constitute a socio-psychological context or framework within which such a re-examination is done. Although Christian thinking must not be *determined* by its external and internal environment, it cannot afford to be indifferent to it ; hence the importance of understanding environmental factors as a context within which one has to do independent thinking. What contribution should the Church make in this respect ?

II.

Today racism seems to be taking a vastly different form compared with that of the past, even as late as 1954, the year of the Evanston Assembly of the WCC.

1) In 1954 the WCC dealt with *racism* in terms of social injustices perpetuated largely by the white race against the coloured races. Today there is abroad a strong tendency, more particularly among some coloured peoples who have been oppressed in the past, to think of racism as a means to be employed to achieve social justice for their self-determination and full participation in national and international life. To them, racism is a dynamic force necessary to achieve social justice. Although we may point out that the white race is harvesting what it has sown, it is indisputably clear that such a position cannot be condoned on the basis of social justice, let alone justified from the standpoint of the Christian Gospel. The fact that this tendency is growing today, however, is a serious enough challenge to the Christian Church.

2) More positively, there is a growing sense of solidarity among the people of non-white races, not necessarily *against* the white race as their common enemy, but out of the sense of necessity that after all it is they themselves who can improve their status, changing the pattern which had been set by the white people. They cannot count on the white people to voluntarily relinquish their privileged position. Thus much of the initiative has been transferred from the white people of good will to the non-white leaders.

3) Over against this, there seems to be a "stiffening of the back" on the part of some white people. They feel threatened by the kind of racism mentioned above. To them such racism is a dark force that will destroy all the values and virtues inherent in the "white civilization" or the "western way of life", and therefore must be resisted at all cost. The result is a rejuvenation of the attitude that can best be described as that of "white supremacy" in this day and age.

4) Racism among some coloured peoples tends to take the form of anti-Christianity, because Christianity has, to their minds, been so closely identified

with the white race. This tendency is sometimes accompanied by a resurgence of non-Christian religions, e.g. Islam, in protest against Christianity. Sometimes it may turn to the outright rejection of all religions.

5) In many (African and) Asian countries where Christians are in a tiny minority ethnic tension exists which may be accentuated, supported or at least accompanied by religio-cultural tensions (e.g. Hindu Tamil vs Buddhist Sinhalese in Ceylon). Here the language does not seem to be the cause of conflict but rather a symbol of ethnic differences. What is the role of the Christian community in such a situation? What can the ecumenical movement say in addressing itself to Christians living in such a situation or do to be of help to them?

6) Regardless of their race, colour or religion, many people experience great insecurity in the modern industrial society. Its inherent tendency toward mass society and the dehumanization of man provokes a deep need to find emotional security in a readily identifiable social group or a series of such groups. Is it really humanly impossible for man to belong only to the human race at large? The Church needs to gain a much more profound understanding of what these groups mean to man in the modern society. Is this desire to belong to an identifiable social group contradictory to the general tendency of modern industrial society to become increasingly dynamic and open, notwithstanding a new pattern of stratification? Among those readily identifiable groups, what place should or do racial and ethnic groups occupy? More importantly, how should the Church regard racial or ethnic identification as a basis for such social grouping today?

7) Finally, the question of *ethnic churches* in a pluralistic society needs fresh inquiry. This may also provide a proper frame of reference for a socio-theological discussion of the idea of "separate development", still tenaciously held by some Christians whose moral integrity cannot be questioned (e.g. *apartheid* or *autochthonous* development in South Africa). These discussions will ultimately lead us to the question: theologically speaking, what is "race"?

III.

The integrity of the Christian Church is at present being tested. Its moral right to speak on the racial problem is seriously questioned by people who, because of their race, colour and ethnic origin, have long suffered from social injustices and human indignities. They are of the opinion that the Church so far has failed to take this problem really seriously, and tend therefore to write the Church off entirely. A related question, at this point, is whether the Church can speak in an undivided voice on this issue and if so, how? How far is the Church a genuinely supra-racial community of Christians? Has the ecumenical movement been concerned as seriously with the racial and ethnic division of the Church as with confessional and denominational division? Or, conversely, how can the supra-racial and supra-ethnic community of Christian people be fully realized in any given local community while confessional and denominational differences are left unquestioned? Let us admit that churchmen (clergy and laity alike) seem to have failed, so far at least, to understand the true nature

of the problem. Their reaction to it has been by and large *either* moralistic *or* emotional. Much energy has been expended (if not wasted) in dealing with a hundred and one peripheral issues (which are symptoms of the problem rather than the problem itself) without touching the basic issues. Or, much effort has been put forth in developing and imparting techniques in the hope of eradicating discrimination in many areas (e.g. employment, education, housing, etc.), without tackling the root-cause of discrimination, namely prejudice, except to say that prejudice is bad or unchristian.

What is needed if we are to face the challenge squarely ?

1) It is necessary to see in what measure the racial and ethnic tensions which are prevalent in our society are basically due to structural changes caused by the impact of modern industrial / technological civilization and to the increasingly high degree of mobility of population in it both horizontally and vertically.

2) The problem of racial and ethnic tensions in one country or community are part and parcel of a world-wide phenomenon. Thus viewed it can no longer be seen merely in terms of local majority-minority tensions, but rather as that of polarization of world society into two camps. On one hand, in the old pattern, which is rapidly disappearing, the white man used to tell the coloured people what to do and the coloured people simply obeyed him. On the other hand, the new pattern has not quite emerged yet, in which mutual (or two-way) communications between the white and the coloured peoples should take place.

3) This means that our situation is pregnant both with danger and opportunity. The lack — or even total absence in some areas — of communication breeds suspicion and mistrust toward conflicting groups, so that each shouts *about* the other into the ears of the third party, real or imaginary, and tension builds up to the exploding point. On the other hand, when the master — servant relationship has been destroyed, there arises a real possibility of building a channel of mutual communication between them. Churchmen must see that this situation is already upon them ; and must take to their hearts the seriousness of the lack of communication and make an all-out effort to establish it.

4) It is necessary to look for solutions to problems of race tension in terms of the "power structure" of society. For example in the US scene, compare the struggling churches in the so-called changing neighbourhood where several ethnic groups present an immediate problem of ethnic integration of the congregation with the high powered churches in "all white" suburbia, which are attended by most of the policy-makers of industry and politics. In the one, small people are "threatened" by a multi-ethnic situation while in the other big people are complacently perpetuating the racial discrimination built into their society. Furthermore it is important to take note that the organized forces of politics, labour, and secular pressure group that have power to force the change may be outside of either one of these churches. The point is that the racial and ethnic tensions of our day must be seen within the framework of the structural change of society.

5) Churchmen need to understand the deeper meaning of such phenomena as the white citizens council, Ku Klux Klan, apartheid, and the Black Muslim Movement. These and many other racist movements purport to solve the problem of racial and ethnic tensions by way of "saving one's own skin at the expense

of the other fellows", and if successful at all they may save their skin but at the expense of their own soul. If in the 19th century our forbears ventured to go to far away countries to save the perishing souls of the heathens, we in the latter half of the 20th century have the mission to save the souls of those who are preoccupied with saving their skins. How are we to perform this mission ?

6) Churchmen need to understand that the coloured peoples, who have so far been victims of social injustice caused by the racism inherent in the colonial imperialism of the Western powers or the white race, can no longer be merely an object of humanitarian philanthropic concern of the white people. The concept of "the white man's Burden" is completely irrelevant to our contemporary situation. The most crucial question is not what one side does to or for the other, but what sort of relationships can be entered into by one with the other. It is a basic reorientation of relationships between the white and the coloured races that will determine whether humanity's future is bright or dark. Without the kind of relationships which enhance mutual respect, trust and confidence so as to enable all the racial groups together to work toward a better society, all other efforts to reduce tensions and eradicate discrimination will be ultimately in vain.

7) In many non-Western lands, which are still to a large extent missionary fields, in spite of the emergence of the so-called "younger churches", churchmen, both indigenous and overseas, need to understand the "racial dynamics" which are determining the shape of society, both domestic and international, and consequently the immediate destiny of all. Africans in British Central Africa, for example, are convinced that there is no solution for their problem, which they conceive of as racial through and through, outside of political solutions ; hence their preoccupation with politics. In the same area, Africans cannot get away from the feeling that the labour — management conflict is *ipso facto* the African-white conflict. And in both instances, the whites are trying to defend the position of their racial supremacy under the guise of political order, industrial efficiency, and so on. In such a situation as this, how can churchmen on both sides of the camp cope with the built-in racism of political and industrial relations ?

8) Finally the implications of the growing numerical strength of the Afro-Asian nations within the family of nations and the tendency toward their forming a bloc must be fully appreciated. What is this going to mean to the future of the United Nations and its related agencies ? The withdrawal of the Union of South Africa from the British Commonwealth may be taken as a straw in the wind. This question needs to be seen in the light of the increasing trend for the Afro-Asian countries to become a "battleground" of the cold war. Here is a situation where Christians of white skin, simply by virtue of their white skin, are suspect by the Afro-Asian peoples.

These points taken together indicate how important it is for the Church to grasp the full implications of racism in its contemporary form. Sentimental "non-racism", moralistic exhortation to transcend racial differences, mere social engineering by way of deploying various inter-group relations techniques to promote better relationships between races — all fall short of the basic issues of contemporary racism. A deeper approach is needed. Surely it is at this point that the Church can make its most needed contribution.

The Quest for Unity in Evangelism

with particular reference to the Church in India

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Unity in evangelism comes out of unity in purpose. And purpose relates to the end-result, the final outcome — not to immediate objectives. We are all agreed that evangelism is to make widely known what God in Christ has done, is doing, and will do for the world of men. But to what end is it all leading? That is the question for which we do not have a common answer.

The Divine purpose in evangelism is the ultimate consummation of His will for His creation. We say that it is "given", and we mean by that to affirm our conviction that the end is perfectly clear in God's own mind. He knows what He is about. We only see the end-result in part. We cannot, therefore, reach any general agreement about the final outcome of evangelism, except that the fulfilment of God's purpose is the final establishment of God's reign. Our Lord's announcement of the Good News consisted in just this declaration about the Kingdom.

Both Biblical revelation and Christian experience would confirm that the spreading of this Good News of the Kingdom is evangelism. It involves four fundamental assertions of Christian faith which describe the reign of God. First, the *whole* creation, life in its totality, every aspect of what we associate with earthly existence, will be brought eventually into this Realm. Second, the reign of God, in a special sense, refers to mankind. If God's purpose for His creation is delayed, it is because man, as no other creature, rebels against God's will being done. Man's sinfulness is the chief deterrent. By accepting the assurance of God's forgiveness offered in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, through repentance and faith, men become "converted" from rebellion to obedience. Thirdly, this work of redemption, made manifest in human history in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is *being* done — now and everywhere in our world ! God is at work through His Holy Spirit transforming everything, over-ruling every power which works contrary to His purpose. Finally in the fulfilment of His purpose, God is making use of men. So that we believe that when men are convicted of God's redemptive purpose in their lives, they discover their vocation. They find their calling as "witnesses", working together with God in a new sense of fellowship with other men to fulfil God's purpose for His creation. Thus evangelism is at the same a cosmic process, a Divine activity, a historic reality and a "people's movement".

Division caused by immediate goals

But despite this possible general agreement with regard to the nature and task of evangelism we tend to fall apart and become divided when we begin to formulate immediate goals. It may be that this is due to our preoccupation as evangelists with what we set up as our objectives. In so doing we often fail to relate our immediate goals to God's ultimate purpose. In elaborating this thesis I shall limit my observations to conditions in my country with which I am most familiar. But it is not impossible that what I say from my Indian experience is also relevant to Christians elsewhere. In broad outline all immediate goals of evangelism would seem to fall into three main categories : social action, Church-centric goals and sectarian objectives.

Some evangelists hold that, especially in our day, our immediate end is to help further the rapid social changes in which we are involved. They interpret the social evils of our age as demonic forces, "principalities and powers", against which God is battling, and in that battle the Christian should take sides with God. They would even claim that in this enterprise cooperation is possible both among Christians themselves and with all other secular agencies which work towards this same end. The programme for social action might include men representing Churches ranging all the way from rigid Roman Catholicism to Quaker liberalism. The basis of unity is the least common denominator of Christian faith. But to that extent the fundamental affirmations of these various Church groups still continue to divide.

The Church-centric goal has for its objective the extension of the Church by bringing into it all men of other faiths and thus to make the world Christian. Mass evangelism, both in post-Christian and in non-Christian cultures, seeks to realize these ends by means of the numerical and geographic expansion of the Church. But this expansion is invariably understood to mean a particular

denomination or "communion". Thus the division still persists. Sometimes it breaks out in unseemly rivalry, but more frequently it finds expression in needless duplication of work and consequent waste in resources.

Sectarianism is an exaggerated form of the Church-centric type of evangelism. Here the immediate objective is to make men accept a particular creedal position as Christians, emphasizing certain specific doctrines as fundamental. Of recent times sectarianism seems to have broken out like rash in some parts of India. It is a phenomenon which we find unable to check as these sectarian enterprises are largely manned and directed by missionary agencies from abroad, especially from the United States. Sometimes the sectarian type of evangelism is the work of free-lance missionaries supported by a particular Christian group in their homeland, but in any case all of them seem to be capable of commanding considerable financial resources. American capitalism, dissatisfied with the recognized denominational work in India to stem the possible tide of communism, we are told, provides the means for these free-lance missionaries and sectarian groups. How far that is true, I do not know.

Unity in evangelism, whereby we can witness to the Gospel as a community, holding together in one fellowship persons of different theological convictions and gifts, is thus marred by our inability to subordinate immediate goals to the ultimate purpose, and to relating these together so that they are derived from and inspired by it.

Comity, Cooperation and Unity

From the early days of Christian missions in India this difficulty was realized. Comity arrangements were therefore devised according to which it was agreed that evangelistic work by various missions was to be limited to defined geographical areas mutually approved. But this only led to a perpetuation of denominationalism to which the Indian Christian was made an unwilling victim. For the Indian Christian himself was not interested in the theological differences underlying. As Bishop Azariah once put it, denominations became a matter of geography in consequence of comity. Moreover, it became increasingly apparent that wastage in men and money could be avoided, and more effective work done, if denominational forces could be persuaded to cooperate, at least in carrying out certain specific projects. Medical work, education, and institutions for the training of the ministry were among the earliest of such experiments in cooperation.

In our experience in India the gain by this advance from comity to cooperation has not led to any appreciable result in terms of unity for evangelism. The hope that cooperation will lead to unity has not yet been fulfilled. We have magnificent instances of cooperative institutions — like the Vellore Medical College and Hospital, as well as many other Arts and Training Colleges, — but from the standpoint of evangelism, the governing motive is still based on separate views about the immediate goal. Thus we find cooperating institutions frequently rent asunder by internal divisions. In fact, it is our experience that of recent times these divisions have become more acute. United evangelistic efforts to preach the Word to the non-Christian, on the one hand, and to renew the life of the local Church, on the other, are not considered to be the concern of these cooperative projects. As professional institutions and welfare agencies, however, they are absolutely first-rate.

Some decades ago, the National Christian Council of India sought to promote United Weeks of Witness in Cities and important rural centres. All the Churches in a particular place were urged to arrange an entire weeks' programme, once a year, when an area-wide evangelistic campaign was launched. Churches were urged to prepare for this event. Suitable literature was provided by the NCC. The programme consisted largely of daily Bible studies and revival addresses of the nature of a convention for all the Christians of the locality. Also it was an occasion of daily preaching and Christian witness to non-Christians. But these Weeks of Witness steadily petered out as united enterprises. They continue in some places as somewhat intermittent phenomena, but usually as denominational rather than united campaigns of Christian witness.

Hindrances to Unity in Evangelism

At this point we are faced once again by the question, "What hinders unity in evangelism?" The answer from the standpoint of our experience in India may be specifically stated in terms of four main reasons. First, the unfortunate distinction which still is made between the Church and Mission. This distinction was undoubtedly made with the best intention in the early decades of this century. Foreign Mission boards felt that the Indian Church should be encouraged to become more and more self-supporting and self-governing. Local congregations and area councils were therefore urged to raise their own money to pay for their clergy and to maintain their Church buildings. The Mission was to take care of the upkeep of schools, colleges, hospitals and other evangelistic agencies and institutions. By this process of devolution, the Mission continued to be responsible for evangelism. The local congregations and Church Synods came to accept the idea that their responsibility consisted only in taking care of their church life and in paying for their clergy. Evangelism was not their concern; the Mission was to carry that forward with its own personnel and resources. To check this evil we have now introduced the policy of Integration of Church and Mission. But the integration is thought of more in terms of unification of administration which has resulted in a monolithic structure without in any way altering the departmentalization of the various concerns of the Church so that evangelism still continues to be a "department" which is reserved for the representatives of various Foreign Mission Boards as their special concern.

Now, the Mission Boards are denominationally directed, consequently Mission interests are denominational. Because of this, whether in the Church of South India (which is the result of the organic union) or in the United Church of North India (which is a federation) the diverse pulls of denominational loyalties persist. This is the second reason for disunity in evangelism both in terms of the renewal of the life of the Church and of preaching the Gospel to those outside. Some amount of cooperation in evangelism we have certainly achieved, but the hope that through such cooperation we would realize unity in the end is still unrealized.

It is in this connection that reference must be made to a third reason. It is World Confessionalism, which has developed alongside the ecumenical movement. Whatever the benefits of this trend for denominational Churches in various countries to become part of corresponding denominational world bodies, its immediate effect on the Church in India has been to underscore and emphasize

denominationalism. Revived interest in denominational heritage for the members of the Older Churches, where it is woven into the fabric of national culture and history may be the beginning of a true understanding of the nature of the Church and its God-given unity. But for the People of God in the Younger Churches denominationalism is an imposition from without of meaningless prejudices which distort their understanding of the Church and its Mission for no fault of their own. Sometimes, as in some parts of India, considerations of prestige and economic advantage tend to enhance the appeal of denominational affiliation, now magnified in its world dimension.

The fourth reason is this. Since the close of the second world war a great number of missionaries representing various sects have come to India. Reference to this was made earlier on in this article. Here it may be mentioned that the dominant motive of their activities is to proselytize. Their evangelistic work is mostly confined to the members of local congregations. Working mostly in urban areas where already there are established Christian communities, they have successfully created tragic divisions by setting up prayer halls and "house Churches" which not only draw away members from established local congregations but also pull out people from one group to another. In South India where a generation of Christians is growing up which knows nothing about denominations — except where there are Lutherans and Baptists who do not now form part of the Church of South India — these sectarian groups are causing grievous damage. So much so that some Christian leaders in India have at times thought of requesting the Indian government to restrict entry of this type of missionary to the country. On the other hand, it is not impossible that our Hindu national leaders are not unware of our embarrassment and easily grant visas to such missionaries because their activity is confined to the Christian Church and does not involve any proselytism of Hindus !

Problems and Opportunities created by Disunity

I should not, however, leave the impression that Christians in India are by any means totally frustrated or discouraged by this sorry state of affairs. That would be far from the truth. Perhaps as never before in the history of Indian Christianity we realize today that the Church must revive its sense of Mission and live up to its calling to witness to the Risen Lord through spirit-filled lives which in themselves manifest the transforming power of God's redemptive activity. What is more, we see in all these perplexities and problems both the condition and the challenge to a renewal of the life of the Church and an urgency to communicate the Gospel to the people among whom we live and of whom we form part. Every Church Council in the country has been giving serious thought to the task of Christian witness in our generation in the New India of our day.

Some of the problems discussed may be briefly surveyed here. First, there is the delicate issue of dealing with situations created by the importation of differences of belief and of interpretations of Christian doctrines from the Churches of the West. I may cite as an instance the embarrassment created in youth evangelism by mutual criticism of each other's programme and purpose by the Inter Varsity Fellowship and the Student Christian Movement. We may not ignore the basic differences which divide them. What is called for is not merely tolerance but a sincere desire to probe beneath these differences to find a unity of faith

which can provide the dynamic for true fellowship. Perhaps this situation should be investigated in the light of the local setting, that is of the IVF and the SCM in the context of the particular circumstances where conflicts arise, and mar the total witness of the local Christian community. In any case the need is for immediate action under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

In the second place, we have to face the problem of coordinating the evangelistic efforts of the different agencies of the Church. Our schools and colleges, our hospitals and clinics, our publishing agencies and youth organizations, may be all doing excellent jobs in their various spheres. But no deliberate effort has been made to relate their activities to one another so that they are conscious of the common end of evangelism. True, a beginning has been made in this direction by the National Christian Council and its various regional agencies. But the conviction has still to gain hold on all of us that we are sharing a common responsibility. To illustrate this point I might refer to the YMCA and its relation to the Church in India. No other Christian institution in India has succeeded in making close contact with non-Christian youth as the YMCA. By the peculiar genius of its manysided programme, the facilities it offers to its membership irrespective of all distinction of caste, creed and colour, and the opportunities it provides for service to the needy and under-privileged, the Indian YMCA has drawn together in a real fellowship its Christian and non-Christian members. But as an evangelising agency its effect has been necessarily limited. The function of the YMCA is to pave the way, create a condition of receptivity to the Gospel. The Church should, therefore, take over where the YMCA has done its part and lead youth to decision in regard to the claims of Jesus Christ. And this cannot be unless the Church establishes close relation with the YMCA by strengthening the faith of its Christian members so that their witness within the fellowship of the local YMCA challenges their Hindu friends. What is said here about the YMCA applies also to other institutional agencies of the Church, such as our schools, colleges and hospitals.

All this leads to the third issue which, in a way, is crucial to our situation in India : the problem of relating what are in fact two aspects of evangelism, the renewal and growth of the Christian life of those already in the Church and the preaching of the Gospel to those of other faiths. The dichotomy of Church and Mission to which reference was made earlier on was in great part responsible for separating these as two different concerns, the one entrusted to the Indian clergy and the other handed over to the "District Missionary" with his corps of Indian assistants. While it made possible local congregations to become self-supporting it also encouraged them to be self-centered. The big thing was to raise enough money to run their own parish. Also, it made them introverted. Their own spiritual growth as a parish was the chief preoccupation. Their mission to witness to the non-Christian world around them was an added extra which has become optional undertaking. Similarly the corps of evangelists concentrated attention on preaching the Gospel to the non-Christian as their speciality. Their witness was more that of individuals rather than that of the community of Christians in the locality. As indicated earlier steps have indeed been taken in some areas of the Indian Church to set this right. But more needs to be done to make the local congregation conscious of its Mission to witness, on the one hand, and to instil into the mind of the full-time corps of evangelists that their mission is in fact the mission of the local Church — not of a

bodywhich has its headquarters somewhere in Europe, England or America.

A fourth consideration is the rapid pace at which the Welfare State in India is taking over responsibilities for the social progress of the people. Many of the service projects which were once associated with our evangelistic work have become part of the State's undertaking. This has raised several issues. The secular state has its own ideas about religious education. It is insistant that social service should be done without any "ulterior motive" of conversion. Our evangelistic work in tribal areas particularly is suspected of anti-national prejudices. The State is exercised over the foreign personnel and the foreign aid associated with the work of evangelism. Some amount of restriction is increasingly placed on these. What is called for on our part is informed understanding of these State measures, a readiness to cooperate with whatever programme of social service we can render as the Indian Church and a courage to explain to the authorities where we encounter difficulties in aligning ourselves with the plans of the Welfare State. This cannot be done unless there is a real sense of unity among us, which needs especially to be evidenced in the cooperative institutions we undertake. It is distressing to find in New Delhi representatives of different Foreign Mission Boards negotiating with the Central government on concerns of their own, although the practice is growing for the National Christian Council to act for the Indian Church at large.

Finally, there is the new situation created by the resurgence of Hinduism. For the first time the Christian evangelist encounters organized opposition. Repeated efforts have been made, since Independence, to invoke the aid of the State to restrict the missionary work of the Church. Conversion to Christianity, it is complained, breaks up the solidarity of the nation by introducing new loyalties which displaced the convert from family, community and nation. More than all, it is resented that a Hindu should prefer a faith other than that of his ancestors, thereby questioning its value. Besides, it is claimed, there is in fact no need for a Hindu to go over to Christianity because Hinduism is comprehensive enough to find room within its fold for those who wanted to describe themselves as Christians in belief and practice. All this calls for a *total* approach to renascent Hinduism on the part of the Indian Church. Any trend towards a mere "revival" of Christianity, in the narrower sense of preserving traditional values, whether of denominationalism, of long-accepted patterns of Church life or of narrow exclusivism in Christian belief and practice, will only result in a futile isolation that would prevent a total impact of the whole Church on the entire life and thought of contemporary Hinduism. Courageous thought needs to be given to problems of cultural identification so that evangelism is not associated with disruption of family, community and nation. There is pressing need for adventuring into yet untried methods of communication of the Gospel. Possibilities are opening up for intimate conversation with Hindus into which we should be willing to enter with informed understanding and sympathetic appreciation. Such willingness should dare to show itself as ready to be convinced of the Hindu claims as it is eager to convince Hindus of the Truth, the Way and the Life. More than all the Church in India, in due sense of unity in mission, should endeavour to cooperate with the current forces of renascence in the cultural, social and religious life of the country so that they are re-inforced by faith in a God that is active in history for the redemption of man, and redirected to fulfil His purpose for His creation.

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